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Analyst:

Date: 02/04/92

Time: 10:54:02

Distributed to:

SWO.ED.S.SS.SSS.SSO.D.P.C.E.SP.MR.CMS.ARA.SCT.FM.DS.CA.OCS.M.TF1

FBIS 105FEB04

UNCLAS 6T

Venezuela: Rebels Retain Control of Positions in Maracaibo

PA0402153692 Madrid EFE in Spanish 1258 GMT 4 Feb 92

[Excerpt] Maracaibo, Venezuela, 4 Feb (EFE) -- Rebel military units have maintained their control of the airport and bridge over Lake Maracaibo, 700 km northeast of Caracas, where intensive shooting is continuing, according to local radio stations.

Confrontations are also taking place around the state-owned Channel 11 television station, the governor's residence, the government palace, the Legislative Assembly, and the City Hall, according to eyewitnesses.

Manuel Marin, president of the Legislative Assembly, has announced that the whereabouts of Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, governor of Zulia, the capital of which is Maracaibo, are unknown.

Marin made a radio appeal for the people to remain alert in defense of democracy, and called the deputies of that oil-rich state to an urgent meeting.

The Legislative Assembly president added: "We must prepare to wage battle in the next few hours for the democratic system. Members of all political parties must do what we know should be done at this time."

"We will not allow the constitutional system to be violated. The Legislative Assembly will meet to issue a statement. If the governor's palace is taken, we will not allow the democratic system to be blemished," Marin said. [sentence as received]

There were also confrontations and shooting between the National Guard and unidentified policemen in downtown Maracaibo. There were an as-yet-unspecified number of deaths. [passage omitted]

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